

SERIOUS
CONSIDERATIONS
CONCERNING THE
DOCTRINES

OF

Election and Reprobation :

Extracted from a late AUTHOR.

THE THIRD EDITION.

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TO THE
R E A D E R.

I Should be glad to see any account of God's dealings with man, which might rectify all our errors with convincing evidence, and scatter our darkness like a rising sun. But in the mean time, let us bear with one another, remembering it is the prerogative of the great God only, to pierce through all his own infinite schemes with an unerring eye, to surround them with an all-comprehensive view, to grasp them all in one single survey, and to spread a reconciling light over all their immense varieties. Man must yet grapple with difficulties in this dusky twilight; but God in his time will irradiate the earth more plentifully with his light and truth. Then darkness and contentions shall fly away for ever! Amen!

✱✱✱ **T** HAT there is a general sufficiency of pardon, grace, and happiness provided for all mankind thro' Jesus Christ, which it is left to themselves to accept or refuse, may, I think, be proved by the following considerations:

His ministers indeed, as they know not the event of things, may be sincere in offering salvation to all persons, according to their general commission, *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* But how can God or Christ be sincere in sending them with this commission, to offer this grace to all men, if God has never provided such grace for any but the Elect, no, not so much as conditionally?

'Tis hard to conceive, how the great Governor of the world can be sincere, in inviting sinners, who are on the brink of hell, to cast themselves upon an empty word of invitation, a mere shadow and appearance of

of support, if there be nothing real to bear them up from those deeps of destruction, nothing but mere words and empty invitations. Can we think that the righteous and holy God would encourage his ministers, to call them to lean and rest the weight of their immortal concerns upon a gospel, a covenant of grace, a Mediator, and his merit and righteousness; all which are a mere nothing with regard to them, a heap of empty names, an unsupporting void, which cannot uphold them? When our blessed Redeemer charges the *Jews* with aggravated guilt for refusing his grace, can we suppose, he had no grace in his hand to offer them? Or when he, as it were, consigns them over to death, because (says he,) *ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life*; can we suppose, he has no eternal life, not so much as a conditional grant of it in his hands for them?

To avoid these hard and absurd consequences of the *calls of grace and offers of salvation*, where none is really provided, some roundly assert, *There are no calls of grace, no offers of salvation at all in the word of God to any but the Elect*. But this runs counter to a great many plain scriptures, wherein pardon and salvation are proposed to all sinners whatsoever, without any regard whether they are chosen of God or not. And it is the design and voice of the whole current of scripture, to call sinners to repentance by promises of mercy, and to inforce that which *Isaiab* speaks, (*chap. lxxv. 6, 7.*) *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found: Call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

II. It is very hard to defend the *Sincerity* of the Spirit of God, in awakening the consciences of those persons who are not elected, [as appears from this, that they live and die in their sins] and stirring them up to think of receiving the salvation of Christ upon
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the terms of the gospel, if there be no such salvation provided for them to receive upon any terms. It is hard to suppose he should excite the consciences of such sinners in any degree, to any repentings for sin, and bring them near to the kingdom of heaven, in the beginnings of conviction, if there was no pardon provided in any sense for those who are not chosen, whether they repent or no. It is hard to suppose he should give them any, even the weakest excitations, to trust in the merit of a Saviour, if that merit has obtained no salvation for them, not so much as conditional.

Shall it be ever said, that God the Father and his Son and Spirit, have done each their parts to encourage and excite non-elect sinners to accept of, and trust in the gospel for salvation, when there is not so much as the least salvation, even in a conditional sense, provided for them to accept of?

III. It is equally difficult to vindicate the *Equity* of God, as the *Judge* of all men, in condemning unbelievers for not accepting the offers of pardon, if no pardon was provided for them; and in punishing them eternally for not resting on the merit of Christ, and receiving his salvation, if there was no such merit for them to rest upon, nor any such salvation for them to receive. Surely it will appear in that day, that the condemnation of sinners, and their eternal misery, was merely the fruit of their refusing to receive the grace of God provided for them, and offered to them, and not of any want of sufficient provision made for them, by him who calls them to receive it. The language of Christ, in his ministry to sinners, is, *Come to the feast of the gospel, for all things are ready. This is the Condemnation, that when light came into the world, they loved darkness rather than light. Men are expressly condemned, because they would not come unto Christ, that they might have life. And (as the Apostle John often represents) therefore they die in their sins.* And surely the Lord Jesus would never

be sent in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that obey not the gospel, if there was no sufficient provision made, whereby they might be enabled to obey it!

It will render this consideration much more forcible, when we observe, that there is a much severer condemnation to those, who have heard of this gospel, and not embraced it, in proportion to the light wherein it was set before them. It shall be *less tolerable* for those who refused the gospel that Christ preached, *than for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment*. So their having it thus proposed, makes their case much worse, than if it had never been proposed to them. And can we think that the righteous Judge of the world will send forth words of grace and salvation, when there is no real grace or salvation in those words, on purpose to make his creatures so much the more miserable? 'Tis very hard indeed to vindicate the righteousness of the sentence, of their double condemnation for refusing pardon and salvation, if there was not any pardon nor any salvation provided for them!

IV. The word of God, by the general commands, promises, and threatnings, given to all men whatsoever, and often repeated therein, represents mankind as in a state of trial, and in the way to eternal rewards or punishments, according to their behaviour in this life. Now it is very hard to suppose, all this should be no real and just representation, but a mere amusement: 'Tis hard to suppose, that all these proposals of mercy, and displays of the gracious dealings of God, should be an empty show with regard to all the millions of mankind, besides the few that are chosen to happiness. 'Tis hard to suppose that they should be so fixed in a wretched, hopeless, and deplorable state, under the first sin of the first man, as to be utterly irrecoverable from the ruins of it: Yea, as unalterably lost, as the very devils are, for whom there was no Saviour provided, and whom God has not
treated

treated in this way of precept, promise, and threatening. Is there not a plain difference made in scripture, between *the angels who sinned, whom God spared not, but cast them down from heaven, under chains of darkness, until the judgment of the great day*; and mankind *who sinned, to whom God giveth time and space for repentance, means of grace, offers of pardon, conditional promises of salvation, with a command to all men to accept it*? What can manifest the blessed God to be upon terms of mercy with them, if this does not?

V. This seems to be a fair and easy way, to answer those texts of scripture, which represent God as (a) *the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe*; and assert that (b) *God calls and commands all men, every where, to repent*. That (c) *Christ tasted death for every man*: That (d) *he gave himself a ransom for all men, to be testified in due time*: That (e) *he died for all*: That (f) *he gave himself to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world*: That (g) *the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world*: That (h) *God so loved the world, that he sent his Son, not to condemn the world, but that thro' him the world might be saved, and that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life*.

Be it granted, that there are other texts which assert, that there is a special number whom the Father chose and gave to the Son, whose salvation is absolutely secured, by the death and intercession of Christ. But why should this hinder our interpreting the foregoing in a more general sense? Why should we affect to limit that grace of God, which God himself expresses in an unlimited manner? The allowing *the absolute salvation of the Elect*, by the righteousness and death

(a) 1 Tim. iv. 10. (b) Acts xvii. 30. (c) Heb. iii. 9. (d) 1 Tim. ii. 6. (e) 2 Cor. v. 14. (f) 1 John ii. 2. (g) Ch. iv. 14. (h) John iii. 16.

death of Christ on the one hand, and *the conditional salvation provided for all mankind*, and offered to them in the gospel, on the other, thro' the all-sufficient value of the same righteousness and death, is a fair, natural, and easy way of reconciling these different texts of scriptures, without any strain or torture put upon any of them.

Agreeable to this are Mr. Calvin's own words, on Matt. xxvi. v. 8. *This is my blood of the New Testament, which was shed for many, for the remission of sins.* "Sub multorum nomine non partem mundi tantum designat, sed totum humanum genus. Under the name of many, he signifies not a part of the world only, but all mankind." And in many other parts of his writings, (particularly in his comment on Rom. v. 18. 1 John ii. 2. 2 Pet. ii. 1.) he clearly expresses the same sentiment, viz. That Christ died for All.

I think it is clear from these considerations, That those who are not absolutely elected to eternal salvation, yet are not predestinated to eternal misery, by any absolute decree of reprobation. Nor are they left in the state of fallen angels or devils, for whom no Saviour is appointed. But there is a conditional salvation provided for all men, and thro' the merits of Christ offered to them in the gospel.

The doctrine of Absolute Reprobation stands in such a direct contradiction to all our notions of kindness and love to others, in which the blessed God is set forth as our example, that we cannot tell how to receive it. Yet, if it were never so true, and never so plainly revealed in scripture, it would only be a doctrine which might require our *silent submission* to it, with awful reverence of the majesty of the great God. But it is by no means a doctrine in which we could or should rejoice and glory, or take pleasure in it, because it has so dreadful an aspect on far the greatest part of our fellow-creatures. Nor do I think the blessed God would require us, so far to divest ourselves of humanity, as to take a secret-satisfaction in the absolute and eternal appointment of such numbers of our kindred

dred flesh and blood, to everlasting perdition. Much less should we make this awful and terrible article a matter of our *public boast and triumph*, (even if we could prove it to be revealed) but rather *mourn for it*.

And since so many scriptures assert, that *Christ* lived and died as a common Mediator of mankind, (tho' with a peculiar regard to the Elect) methinks this doctrine of the extensive goodness of God, is a much more desirable opinion, and should be more cheerfully received by us, as it is so agreeable to our charity to all men, and so necessary for vindicating the justice; goodness, and sincerity of the blessed God, in his transactions with mankind.

When therefore I hear men talk of the doctrine of *Reprobation*, with a special gust and relish, as a favourite doctrine, I cannot but suspect their good temper, and doubt, whether they love their neighbour as themselves. The case is very different, when saints are said in scripture, To rejoice in the public judgments of God, upon the *Antichristian* state, or upon the wicked oppressors, and incorrigible sinners of the world. For that is the effect of God's equity and righteousness, as a wise and faithful Governor. But this would be an instance merely of his dreadful sovereignty, and hardly consistent with goodness.

I would ask leave also to enquire, What great advantages can be derived to religion, by endeavouring to limit the extent of the death of Christ, and consequently to take away all manner of hopes, and endeavours, and prayers, from those who are supposed not to be elected? Does the doctrine of *particular Election* obtain any farther confirmation by it? By no means. Whatever becomes of the rest of mankind, *their* salvation is secured. Does the goodness and *special grace* of God acquire any honour by this limitation? No certainly. Divine grace is the same toward the Elect, whether others are saved or lost.

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Are the Elect any way discouraged by it? Not in the least. But by the contrary doctrine, many persons who are awakened to a sense of sin, and are seeking after Christ for salvation, may be terribly discouraged from receiving his offers of grace, when they are taught to doubt whether there be any grace provided for them, and whether Jesus be appointed to act as *their* Saviour. It may be a means to drive some poor souls to despair, when they hear that unless they are elected, they may seek after salvation by Christ in vain, for there is none purchased for them. And it may tempt them to begin at the wrong end, and seek to pry into the counsels of God, before they dare trust in his grace, or submit to the gospel of Christ.

Now if many inconveniences may arise from thus limiting the virtue of the blood of Christ, and if no valuable end or advantage to religion can be obtained by this narrow opinion: What should make men so zealous to get the greatest part of the world utterly excluded from all hopes and all salvation?

The great objection against what I have said, is this;

“ If there be only an *outward sufficiency of salvation* provided for them who are not elected, or salvation on condition that they believe, but no *inward sufficiency of grace* to change their hearts, and enable them to believe, the event will be the same, as if no salvation were provided: since they themselves cannot believe, being by nature *dead in sin*.”

I answer, It is true, no sinner can believe, but by the almighty power of God. And therefore such are said to be *dead in sin*; and the necessity of a divine power, to raise them from this *spiritual death*, is held forth in many places of scripture. Yet we must say still, that sinners are not under such an impossibility of believing, as if they were *naturally dead*. For if they were, there would be no manner of need or use of any *moral means or motives*, such as commands, promises,

mises, threatnings, exhortations: These would all be impertinent and absurd. For they could have no more influence on sinners, than if we commanded or exhorted a dead body to rise or move; which commands and exhortations would appear ridiculous and useless. Since therefore the blessed God in his word does use these *moral means and motives*, to call sinners to faith and repentance, it is certain, there is *power sufficient* given them, to hear and obey the call: And that they are not under any *necessity of continuing in sin*, and of being destroyed.

With regard to faith, or believing in Christ, in particular, our Saviour thus explains his own words. In one place he saith, *No man can come unto me, except my Father draw him.* And in another place he charges the *Jews* with this as their fault, *Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life.*

Let this then be constantly maintained, that there is not only an *outward sufficiency of salvation* provided thro' the merits and death of Christ, for every one who *repents and believes the gospel*; but also that there is an *inward sufficiency of power* given by God to every one, to hearken to the calls of God's grace, and by faith to receive that salvation. And thus much is sufficient to maintain the sincerity of God, in his universal offers of salvation thro' Christ, and his many commands to all men every where, to repent and believe the gospel: As well as to vindicate his equity at the great day, in condemning the impenitent and unbeliever. For since there was both an outward and inward sufficiency for their recovery, their death lies at their own door, being wholly owing to their wilful, obstinate rejection of God and Christ, and his salvation.

I have only this to add. If serious christians are but desirous to come as near each other as they can, if they are but willing to be reconciled to one another, as far as the present darkneses and difficulties will

will allow: May they not heartily embrace one another notwithstanding some difference in their sentiments? Surely, the desire to do this, will take away a thousand cavils and contentions, and a thousand unchristian reproaches from the lips and pens of those who profess to worship the same God, to believe in the same Saviour, to hope for the operations of the same blessed Spirit, and who desire to ascribe their salvation to the same grace of God, who is blessed for evermore! *Amen.*

F I N I S.

